

# A MILLENNIUM OF CHINESE URBAN HISTORY: FORM, TIME, AND SPACE CONCEPTS IN SOOCHOW

*by F. W. Mote*

[Based on a lecture delivered at Rice University, October 11, 1972, this essay alludes to Houston in the context of urbanization in contemporary societies. The focus of the essay then turns to urbanism in China, and to the Central China city of Soochow, or Su-chow. Elements of the physical form and physical components of the city, concepts of historic time, and concepts affecting the uses of space, are discussed as factors in the urban history of Soochow, and the Chinese People.]

## I. URBANISM AND CHINA'S URBAN HISTORY

Houston is probably the most striking example of urban growth in America today. Its population has trebled or quadrupled during the last three decades, and most of the physical features of the city today, or, at least, those which dominate its skyline and impressed this visitor first, were not even in existence when I last saw Houston three decades ago. The edges of the city, both its legal boundaries and the limits of its built-up area, are now miles away from the places that marked those same edges three or four decades ago. Houston's growth is not typical, but it demonstrates a general truth: Our society has become overwhelmingly urban within a very short span of time.

At the time of the first national census of this republic in 1790, our population was five percent urban. It passed the fifty-percent-urban mark between the censuses of 1910 and 1920, and it now stands at close to eighty percent urban. The movement to the cities has been essentially one-way, and our whole society has been transformed by that. The virtual end of that process has been reached, for our society and for some others. Soviet society in 1970 was about at the stage we reached in 1930 with respect to urbanization (i.e., about 56% urban), and in those same terms, China's is about at the point we reached shortly before the Civil War. England and some other countries

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Mr. Mote is Professor of Chinese History at Princeton University.

are a few steps ahead of us in this seemingly inexorable process of modernization, and its consequences for urbanization. We tend to regard this process of transformation from predominantly rural and agrarian societies to predominantly urban and industrial societies as a natural process, one that eventually will occur everywhere. But it may not.<sup>1</sup> In this case, as in most, it is the history of societies and civilizations that can guide our understanding of what is occurring, and help us to know what can occur.

We have been forced to look at cities with a prodigious thought in mind: We appear to be entering the "urban phase" of human history. Cities have come to provide the normal setting for almost all human lives in Western societies, and in Japan, and in other highly modernized portions of the globe. Urban studies under a number of academic labels now seriously attempt to achieve the status of science. There is now abroad in the land an urgently felt need for a deeper understanding of the urban world in which most of us will live most of our lives. I cannot claim to be one of those scientists who are busily developing the new verities in urban studies. The study of China's cities, past and present, is no more than my historian's hobby. It is a hobby developed initially out of on-the-ground observations of some Chinese cities, and of fascination with those as settings for an endlessly rich and intriguing life. As I pressed my hobby, however, into the underused Chinese documentary materials, and into the new scientific writings on the comparative study of urbanism, I have come to feel that the study of China's urban past is one of the keys to the understanding of China, and that it also holds importance for the study of urbanism in general. The Chinese case holds large and significant truths which do not fit the most commonly encountered generalizations about cities. It is true that historians—perversely, some social scientists would say—seek to be conscious of all facts and all events as unique, on one level of their meaning. But historians also seek pattern and generalization in history, and they too must examine all general statements about human experience to see whether these remain valid in application to the particular things they study. If an emerging science of urban studies is to become valid, the general statements on which it will be built will have to account for the Chinese variants, eccentric or not, difficult to explain or not. This may be one reason for wanting to know more about Chinese cities in history.

China's urban history, however, is more than just *different* from ours. No matter how pervasively influential the Western experience seems to have become in recent centuries, historically speaking the Western models have not been typical of man's experience. Nor is it certain that the rest of the world, especially China, will travel the same path as that we have come along in urban development, even should it acquire the means to do so. Historically speaking, it is the Chinese experience with cities, and not our own, which has to be recognized as the largest, the longest, and the earliest to reach certain

advanced—but pre-industrial—levels of development. A recent comparative study of Chinese and Japanese cities in history offers the calculation that from the time neolithic man invented cities until 1800, about forty per cent of all the humans who ever lived in those cities were Chinese.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, almost one-half of all mankind's accumulated urban experience in traditional societies is that accumulated by the Chinese who, fortunately, have kept some remarkable records of that experience. The other half, or slightly more, of the human experience with cities has been divided up among all the other living and dead civilizations which have ever known cities. The Chinese range and variety of experience in building, in governing, and in inhabiting cities, and in relating cities to the rest of society, is by far the largest block of such experience. Generalizations about urbanism would be scientifically deficient if not cognizant of *any* relevant information whatsoever, even if minute and eccentric. Such generalizations become, practically speaking, all the more deficient when they are formulated without considering so vast a body of material as Chinese history offers us.<sup>3</sup>

A standard view of pre-industrial European cities is that they had to possess separate legal and political status as organized entities in order to be considered cities. Also, we have tended to assume that their inhabitants were a self-consciously urban, self-perpetuating group, apart in society, demanding special status as urbanites, and acquiring attitudes which isolated them, or at least set them quite apart from their fellow nationals residing beyond the edges of their cities. Cities were perceived as an environment so distant that it became an axiom of European history—one developed specifically by Marx and Engels and granted by them an instrumental role in the social process, but also an axiom common to much of European history during the past century—that the rural population normally should be in a relationship of hostility to the urban.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, Chinese cities appear to me to have been strikingly different. They quite clearly were not corporate entities, and had none of the organizational features which set European cities apart in legal and political ways. Of perhaps even greater significance, however, was an urban-rural continuum apparent in psychological, social, and material aspects of Chinese life. Throughout their history the Chinese maintained a fundamental commitment to the values of rural life far more operational and more binding, in the daily events of everyone's lives, than were the rather vague and sentimental idealizations of the rural that sometimes appeared in the West. Here the comparisons that come to mind are with the life styles of the English gentry, or with Rousseau's romanticization of the rural, and the like. The Chinese commitment to the rural was not of that flavor; it was of far greater intensity, far more pervasive, and of much deeper import for history. Yet that did not prevent the Chinese from creating many and large cities, or prevent cities from assuming functions ever more central to the life of the society. The integrating functions of urban places are far more impor-

tant to an understanding of historical processes in China than are any antagonisms between Chinese society's urban and rural sectors.

Despite the apparent anomaly of their often massive walls, Chinese cities characteristically contained rural life and agricultural activities within them. Simultaneously, there almost invariably were urban densities and urban functions extending well beyond those walls. This was true of large and relatively stable cities such as Soochow, where for a thousand years there seems always to have been a cluster of urban areas outside the walls that, for the last five hundred years at least, may have accounted for about one-fourth of the city's population. It was also true of smaller but rapidly growing cities, such as Sungkiang (southwest from Shanghai) where since late Ming times half or more of the population appears to have resided outside the city walls. It is also true of formerly great cities throughout two centuries of recent decline, such as Yangchow, where extensive areas within the city walls returned to agricultural uses while the urban build-ups outside two of the main gates remained stable, or continued to grow. Lacking municipal governments with jurisdictional boundaries, Chinese cities possessed no formal boundaries other than their walls. City walls thus could be both the most prepossessing physical feature in the form of a city, and a meaningless item in the city's organizational life, as well as an at best ambiguous symbol in the social-psychology of urbanism, especially to the Western student who approaches the Chinese city expecting to find other things there. This suggests the true importance of our subject: In their organizational features, in their functions, and as an element of social psychology, the Chinese cities of history, even of very recent history, have possessed some distinctive qualities that modern man elsewhere might well find interesting. The particular Chinese sense of the city can inform us about another variety of urban man. Purely in humanistic terms, that knowledge cannot fail to broaden our sense of what man is, of what we are. Of all the curious reasons that induce man to learn, this is, for many, the most compelling. To achieve some concreteness and focus in a discussion of cities throughout the most recent thousand years of Chinese history, while simultaneously attempting to indicate some of the subject's larger implications, I shall focus here on the historical example of Soochow.

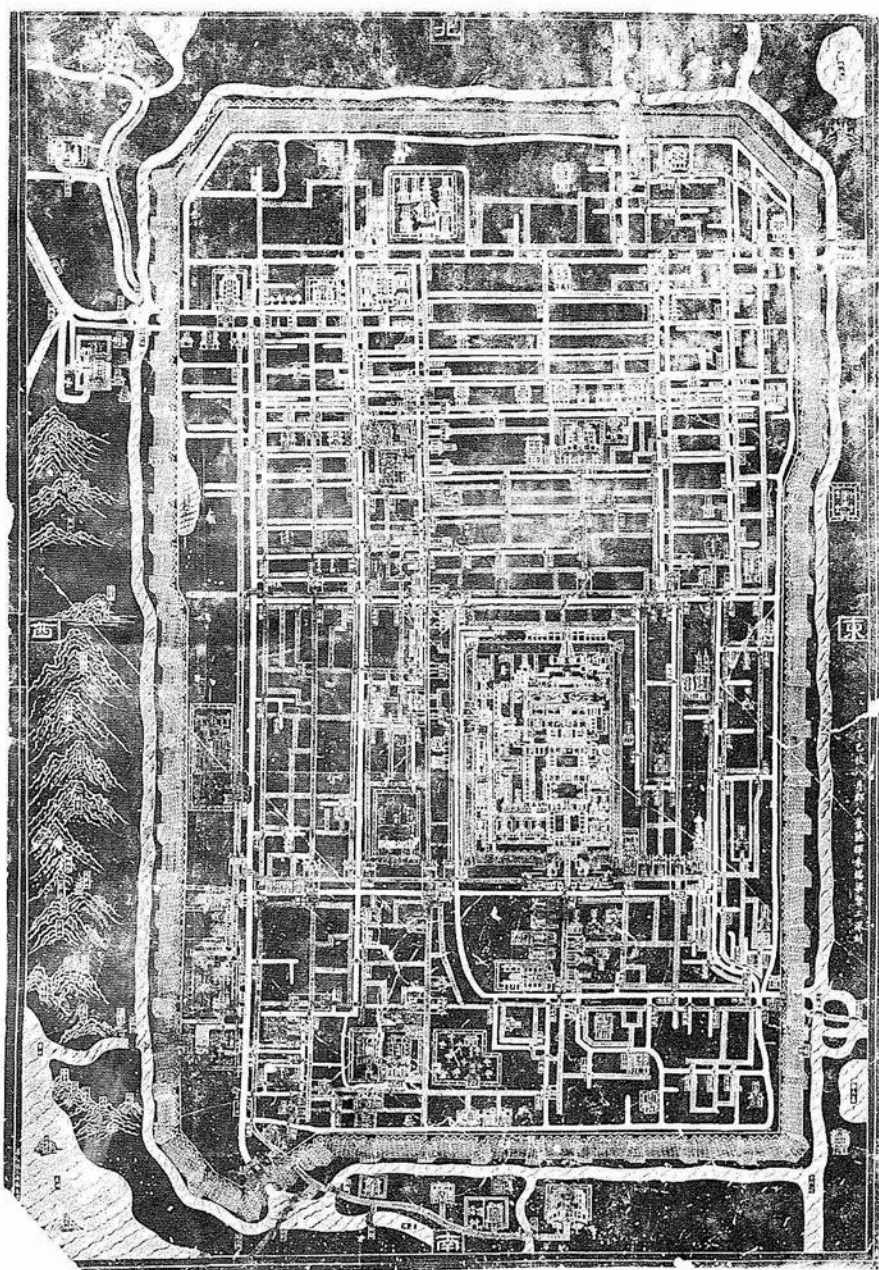
## II. SOOCHOW IN URBAN HISTORY

We are fortunate in possessing a large and rather precise picture-map of Soochow engraved on stone, representing the city as it existed in the year 1229.<sup>5</sup> A rubbing of that, in photographic reproduction, juxtaposed with an aerial photograph made in 1945,<sup>6</sup> displays a truly extraordinary stability of urban form. It is unlikely that a parallel example could be found in any other civilization; that is, that a very large city in continuous and flourishing exis-

tence from 1229 until 1945 would display such sameness of physical form from the earlier to the later date. The walls and moats are identical; the gates are nearly so, one or two having been slightly altered or added; the streets and canals are identical; most of the same bridges appear in both; and many principal buildings are located on the same sites, and bear the same names. One major change appears: an inner-city wall (analogous to the "forbidden city" in an imperial capital), originally built to enclose the offices of civil government, has been removed, and some offices of government have been relocated beyond that former enclosure. From history, we know that the Ming founder ordered that act in 1368, to eradicate the associations of that group of buildings with the government of a recently-eliminated rival in the warfare that led to the fall of the Yuan dynasty and the founding of the Ming. History appears to have left only that one large mark on the physical city in all the centuries from the Southern Sung period to the present. That striking continuity and sameness of form, however, need not encourage us to fall back on the notion of a "changeless China." China in 1945 was exactly 716 years away from the China of 1229, on the time-scale of a continuously changing and growing China. To cite the simplest kind of evidence for that, in 1229 the population of China hovered a bit above the one hundred million mark.<sup>7</sup> In 1945 it was close to five hundred million. The population of Soochow in 1229 can be estimated at about 300,000, and in 1945 at about 600,000. In between those dates the city's population increased in a steady upward curve, and at some points (e.g., just before the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion in the mid-nineteenth century) probably was a bit higher than in 1945, but not spectacularly so. Both sets of figures, those for the Chinese nation and those for Soochow, indicate change. They indicate different rates of change. They suggest subtle complexities in the interrelated urban and rural growth rates, and in the entire process of change. In short, we are concerned with a vital China, not a moribund one.

The Soochow that we see depicted in the map of 1229 was one of the great cities of China, and one of the great cities of the world. Because Chinese cities were not corporate entities, Chinese statistics usually do not preserve separate figures for the populations of what we would call the cities, but include those strictly urban population figures within the statistics for the administrative units to which they belonged, i.e., the counties or prefectures. Therefore the above figure of 300,000 for the population of 1229 is an estimate, but it cannot be far wrong. There is no reason to believe that Soochow's population has ever fallen below that mark since 1229, and it probably had already reached that size several hundred years before that. It probably reached the half-million mark in the sixteenth century, and may have been close to one million just before the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion. The destruction accompanying that rebellion is said uncritically, as part of the folklore about the city, to have cost the lives of a half-million persons, most of them residing in the famous





P'ING-CHIANG T'U PEI Map of Soochow (P'ing-chiang), dating from A.D. 1229.  
 Rubbing, in possession of the Academia Sinica, Taiwan.



AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF SOOCHOW, 1945.  
From United States Army Fourteenth Air Force World War II Archives,  
courtesy Department of Defense.

western suburbs, many of those perhaps temporary refugee residents. In 1911 an observant long-time resident estimated the population, including those suburbs, at 700,000.<sup>8</sup> Estimates made by the police and other administrative officials in the Republican era indicate a population between a half-million and 600,000. The point in reviewing these figures is to ask how many cities in the world, starting at the size Soochow had reached by the twelfth or thirteenth century, have continued in stable, if slow, growth, remaining always one of the major cities of its region, throughout the last seven or eight centuries? The answer is: Probably none, except for Soochow and some other cities of its class in China.<sup>9</sup>

Some comparisons with cities in other parts of the world are instructive. Most historians think of Rome as the greatest city of the ancient world, and of Constantinople/Istanbul as the world's greatest city throughout the long centuries between the fall of Rome and the rise of modern Europe. Constantinople indeed had a population in the range of one million at the peak of its development, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but it fell to an estimated 30,000 on the eve of its fall to the Ottomans in 1453. Thereafter it grew quickly, reaching 100,000 before the end of that century, and 700,000 by the year 1600.<sup>10</sup> As Istanbul, it is at least somewhat discontinuous with Constantinople, for in addition to the facts of population decline and revival, no doubt indicating replacement under the successor regime by persons previously alien to the region, it also became a new city in other senses; it acquired a new language and a new state religion, a new culture, and a new role as head of a new kind of nation-state. Nonetheless, it undoubtedly was Europe's largest city from the sixteenth century onward. The other two largest European cities in the Middle Ages were Cordoba and Palermo, both in the half-million range in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They too (despite the fact that Palermo bridged the two worlds from the eleventh century onward), were built first within another cultural world from Western Europe; that world's contraction in the fifteenth century produced discontinuities in their histories, and their decline from importance. In 1200, only Paris north of the Alps had as many as 100,000 inhabitants; London may then have had 20,000. By 1300, Paris had risen to 150,000, and some of the North Italian cities, notably Venice, Milan, and Florence, were more or less in the 100,000 range. Rome, as late as 1447, still had only 80,000 inhabitants, one-tenth its population in the second century A.D., and occupying only one-tenth of the area within the Aurelian walls. Except for three or four great cities in the Lowlands that were in the 50,000 range, all the other cities of fifteenth century Europe north of the Alps that later were to become the great centers, still were comparable in size to Chinese market towns in the ten thousand to twenty thousand range, although they did not look at all like Chinese towns. Looking beyond Western Europe, Damascus at its height in the eighth century was relatively small, perhaps 150,000. Baghdad had about one million



inhabitants before it was destroyed in 1258 by the Mongols who, at the same time, were sacking other great cities from Western Asia to China. India and other great civilizations in the farther Orient developed several cities in the half-million range, but they did not have continuous histories as major centers.

The point of the comparisons suggested above is that China in the thirteenth century, as Marco Polo noted,<sup>11</sup> had a profusion of cities of size and splendor unknown elsewhere. Soochow was not a national capital, and never was the largest city of China, yet Venice could not compare with it. Venice had not yet reached its greatest development when Marco Polo returned to it from China at the end of the thirteenth century; Soochow surely must have been three times the size of Venice in 1300. Two centuries later, at its peak, Venice had become a city approaching 200,000 inhabitants scattered through 117 coastal islands, using 150 canals crossed by 400 bridges. Soochow, although an inland city, is sometimes called the Venice of China. As one point of comparison, a famous ninth-century poet spoke of Soochow's 390 bridges, and the gazetteers consistently register some 400 bridges, eventually mostly built of stone, in use throughout the centuries thereafter. Venice was in many ways Europe's most splendid city in the late Middle Ages, but it was exceeded in most ways by a score of Chinese cities that endured, retained their stable growth, and matured their urban forms and ways, into the present century. Soochow was one of a dozen leading regional cities that flourished continuously in the quarter-million to half-million range in China; Western Europe did not see cities in the half-million range until the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century such cities began to be numerous in Europe, and in the present century cities of such size are to be found throughout all the industrialized countries, and even in small Asian nations in only the early stages of modernization.

These comparisons confirm our judgment that China's urbanization has been on a somewhat different track from most of the world for a thousand years or more. It reached rather advanced levels of urbanization somewhat sooner than any other country, and reached those through a long and steady growth of its pre-industrial economy. Japan overtook China in level of urbanization by the eighteenth century, also on the basis of a pre-industrial economy.<sup>12</sup> Europe and America have since done so, on the basis of their early industrialization. China has now joined the ranks of the latecomers to modernization. That obscures the fact that it was not a latecomer to a distinctive kind of pre-industrial but relatively high-level urbanization. China's own past may influence its future development, in this as in other things, as significantly as models established in other parts of the world are influencing it. We will not know to what extent that might be so, unless we learn more about China's cities in history.

## III. SOOCHOW'S PLACE IN CHINA'S URBAN HISTORY

Soochow's site held an outpost of Chinese cultural influences long before the region became fully sinified; it claims a past going back to the twelfth century B.C. From the founding of the empire in the third century B.C., it has served as a seat of local and regional administration. But the lower Yangtze was a frontier region that was only slowly absorbed during the early imperial centuries, and Soochow's important growth dates only from the time when the demographic center of China began to shift to the Yangtze provinces, in the ninth and tenth centuries. The superior economic conditions of the region, conditions favorable both to a higher margin in agriculture and a cheaper and more convenient distribution using water transport, provided the real basis of Soochow's wealth; it can be looked upon as the hub of the lower Yangtze drainage, being on the Grand Canal and near the point where that waterway crosses the Yangtze. A two-phased agricultural revolution especially benefited this region. That began with the introduction and improvement of quick-ripening rice in the Sung period, continued through improvement of technology and finally through a second phase marked by the introduction of crops from the New World after the sixteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The increased productivity of agriculture and use of subsidiary crops freed the rice-producing farmer from a necessity to retain the main portion of that basic crop for his own subsistence; ever larger numbers of persons in the growing population could engage in secondary production, and in distribution. Commerce, craft industry, and finance were expanding in scope and volume. The production of luxury goods, and the growth of textile industries (at first silk, and after the fourteenth century also a burgeoning cotton industry), were typical of the Soochow region. Ever larger amounts of labor were required for these secondary economic activities, and the city played an organizing role in drawing and using that labor. The aggregation of raw materials and the distribution of finished products involved an ever larger hinterland. Thanks to the convenience and economy of water transport, Soochow was at the hub of all that, and at the hub of a circle of growing satellite cities—Wu-chiang, K'un-shan, Ch'ang-shu, and Wusih—all of which grew into the 100,000 class after the sixteenth century. Others in that size class also existed, in a second ring slightly farther out, and the whole area was crowded with prosperous market towns of half that size or smaller. Although Soochow remained the great city of the region, urban growth was general for Kiangsu Province south of the Yangtze without producing the one-sided growth of a single city.

The acquisition of wealth in China generally did *not* lead to systematic capital formation and to the deployment of resources to economic activities of the greatest return. At Yangchow, the nearest great city, just north of the Yangtze, particular circumstances led to extreme wealth for a leading mer-

chant group among whom ostentatious consumption and irregular behavior set the tone of life.<sup>14</sup> Soochow was more typical in its use of capital; it poured the excess of its great wealth mostly into land, and into cultural attainment. Both were secure and reliable investments in status and in access to moderate wealth; both reinforced the normative component of Chinese civilization and its predilection for cultural conservatism. Soochow drew to it and fostered the arts of China—the literary arts above all, but also music and painting, calligraphy, the craft arts, the decorative arts, and the minor arts that contributed to the elegant life. Also, Soochow sustained learning, the mechanism for achieving social status and official careers, and the prestige affectation of all who could afford it. It lavished wealth on gardens and art collections and religious institutions; its citizens' dress, their mansions, their delicate foods, their pleasure boats and pleasure houses and theatricals and festivals were reputed to be the finest in all China. If some of those same statements are also made about other places (and, most frequently, they are made of other places in this same region of China), it only proves that Soochow was first among many rivals in the multi-centered urban life of China.

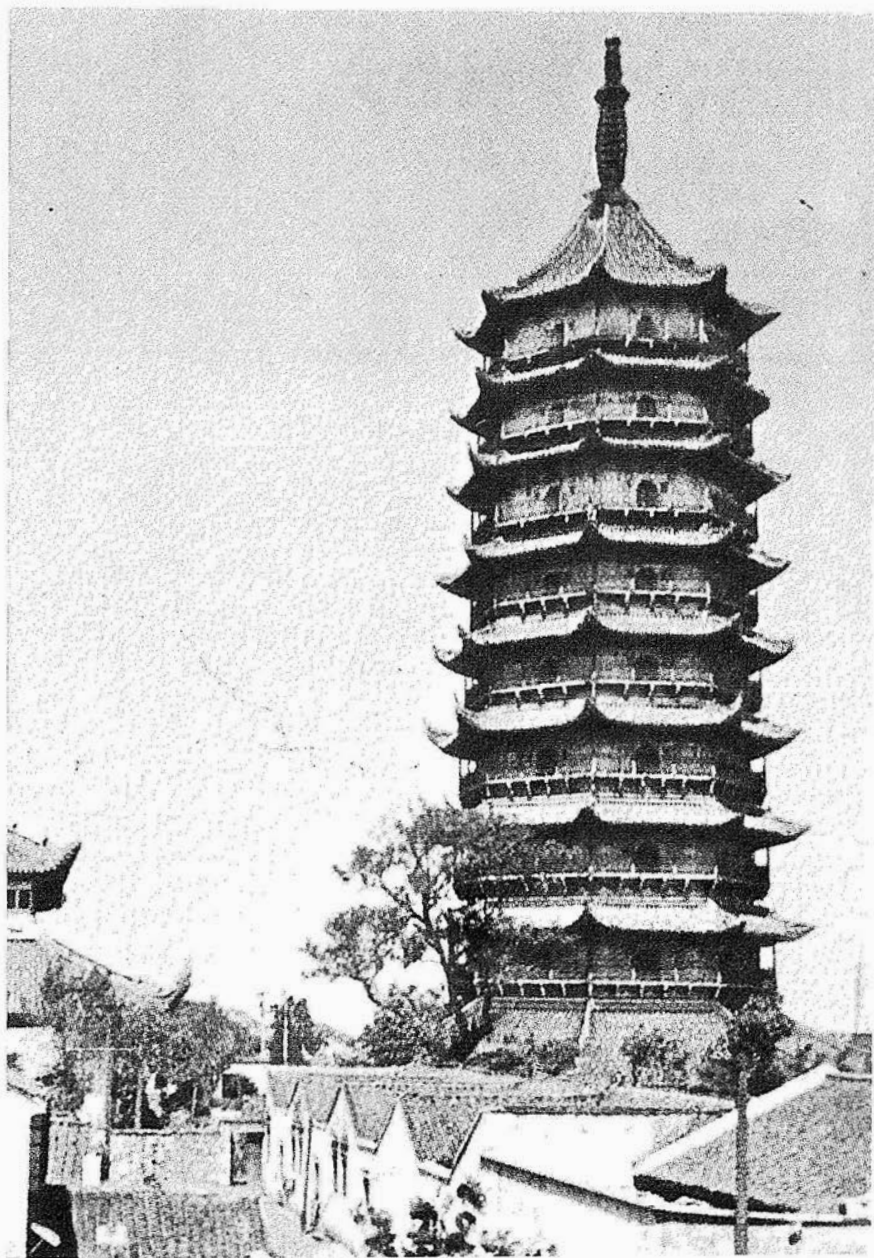
In briefest form, this discussion has suggested the conditions that made Soochow possible, and has offered the most superficial description of its image in the minds of Chinese through the final centuries of the imperial era. Let us enter the city and look closely at it.

#### IV. SOOCHOW OBSERVED

Through the last of the nineteenth century and into the first decade of this century, an American Presbyterian missionary named Hampden C. du Bose lived in Soochow. An uncritical and not very well informed historian, he nonetheless was a perceptive observer. A small guidebook to Soochow which he wrote about 1911 suggests very well the way the city looked to a foreign resident then. These are the opening lines of his guidebook:

On the banks of the Grand Canal eighty miles west of Shanghai, twelve miles east of the Great Lake, and forty miles south of the Yangtze, stands a far-famed city, the silk metropolis of the Orient. Even in this hurried twentieth century a crowd of admirers stands with reverent awe around the statue of antiquity, and gazes upon its towering heights, which seem to pierce the clouds.<sup>15</sup>

The "statue of antiquity" might seem to be a figurative reference to Soochow itself, the embodiment of all the values ascribed by the Chinese to their antiquity. But it is more likely that the Reverend Dr. du Bose refers by that title to Soochow's Great Pagoda. Located within the precincts of a large Buddhist temple compound in the north part of the city, it was 250 feet tall, the highest building in all China at that time.<sup>16</sup> As an ancient monument, it will be discussed below; here it can remind us that as the traveler



THE GREAT PAGODA. The Pei-szu T'a in Soochow.

approached Soochow, its Buddhist temple pagodas towering above all the other structures in the city were the chief distinction of its skyline.

Thinking of the modern traveler's convenience, Dr. du Bose in 1911 recommended that the visitor arrive on the new railroad recently opened from Shanghai. But he noted that "the city walls are not seen to the same advantage as when viewed from a boat on the canal flowing around the city." He recognized the importance of water transportation to the region, and to the city:

Our city stands upon the great artificial highway of the Empire, the Grand Canal, which is from fifty to one hundred yards wide and is spanned by magnificent stone arches—one of these bridges, near Soochow, has fifty-three arches—and when on this great stream the white sails of the junks and small craft are spread to the winds, and the trackers along the path are towing in the opposite direction, it is a beautiful sight. In regard to inland navigation, Soochow is at the hub, and from it great and wide canals diverge as spokes in every direction, each of these being, as the Chinese boatmen say, "a centipede," from the innumerable streams diverging to the right and left, so there is not a city or town or village or hamlet which cannot be reached by boat in this well-watered plain, so inviting to the itinerant. (pp. 7-8)

The great wealth of Soochow made a deep impression on the American in 1911. He describes the elegant mansions of the rich, although he may seldom if ever have been invited into those. He tells about the cultivation of the Soochow people, their refined tastes in rich dress and delicate foods. He noted the great accumulations of capital in the local silver shops and native banks. He sees clearly that the basis of this wealth was the amazingly productive rice culture of the lower delta, coupled with the skills of weavers and artisans, and the entrepreneurial acumen of the businessmen. Foreign interests had created the Treaty Port of Shanghai in the mid-nineteenth century, yet the explosive growth of that nearby international city had not sucked away Soochow's business or wealth, even though by many measures Shanghai had quickly surpassed the older city. For du Bose, the Great Pagoda symbolized Soochow's long-standing superiority, and the view from its highest levels proved that Soochow's wealth was real:

The glory of the capital [of Kiangsu Province] is the Great Pagoda, the highest in China, and so the highest on *terra firma*. Stand near it and behold one of the great wonders of the world! Count the stories, note the verandahs, see the doors, as so many pigeon-holes, and men as pigmies on those giddy heights! Consider the foundation, and what a quarry of hewn stone supports that mighty pile of masonry, which around the base, with the shed room on the ground floor, is one hundred feet in diameter or one hundred yards around. Note the images in *basso relievo* among the clouds, carved on the stones, seated upon the roof, hiding in the niches, and sitting majestic upon the shrines; Buddhist gods inside and Brahman divinities [sic] without—two hundred in number,—it is a high temple of heathenism. The name of the Sir Christopher Wren who planned this tower has not come down to us, but we can admire the skill of the master hand which drew the lines. The walls are octagonal, one wall within and one without, or a pagoda within a pagoda, each wall ten feet thick, the steps rising between them by easy gradations with a walk around before



the next flight is reached, and the floors paved with brick two feet square. There are eight doors to each of the nine stories, and, with the cross passages, the halls are full of light. And what wonderful proportions—sixty feet in diameter at the base, it tapers to forty-five feet on the upper floor; each story slightly lower as you ascend, each door smaller, each verandah narrower. Walk around these porches; see the city lying at your feet; the Dragon Street running south to the Confucian Temple; the busy north-west gate; the pile of buildings constituting the City Temple; the Great Lake to the west; the range of hills and the picturesque pagodas that crown the jutting eminences; the plain dotted every fourth mile with hamlets. See the pagoda to the south,—it marks the city of Wukiang. Follow the Shanghai canal glistening in the sunlight to the east till your eye rests on a hill,—that is Quensan. At the foot of that mountain, thirty miles to the north-east, is Changsoh, a city of 100,000 inhabitants. Look north-west up the Grand Canal, thirty miles,—that is Mount Wei-ts'ien. There is Wusih, with a population of 150,000, and within this radius of thirty miles are one hundred market towns of from one thousand to fifty-thousand inhabitants and probably 100,000 villages and hamlets—five millions within the range of vision! (pp. 39-40)

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Precisely nine hundred years ago, in the year 1072, one of the many Japanese visitors to Sung China came to Soochow. The Japanese Buddhist monk Seijin had approached the city in the best possible way, having traveled north on the Grand Canal from Hangchow, soon to become the capital of the Southern Sung dynasty, but even then a splendid city. As he traveled toward Soochow he wrote in his diary:

There are wooden bridges and there are stone bridges; there are bridges of such number that I would not be able to know how many. As we approach the Ch'a-ling Pavilion, there is one called the Li-wang Bridge which is one *li* and 2 *chang* [about 1800 feet] in length, having 48 spans. This bridge has a high railing painted a vermillion color, and has four towers on it. We passed this bridge. . . . Then we came to the Wu-chiang Hsien city walls . . . passing the city, we went on. . . . traveling another forty-five *li* we arrived at the walls of the prefectural city [Soochow] at dusk. We stopped outside the walls and spent the night.<sup>17</sup>

That was on the evening of October 16, 1072. On the following morning his boat entered the city, passing through one of the water gates that are located next to each of the land gates.

Seijin spent two days visiting Soochow before he had to go on, northward along the canal, to reach his destination at the famous Buddhist center on the Wu-t'ai Mountain in Shansi. One pressing duty while at Soochow was to visit the memorial shrine of Entsū Daishi, a Japanese monk who had died at Soochow early in the eleventh century. That required a visit to the P'u-men Monastery in the suburbs. Civil and religious leaders in Soochow arranged that he be assigned ten men, four to carry his sedan chair, and the rest to go before and after in escort. This lavish treatment, and the many gifts bestowed on him and the other courtesies extended throughout his visit are the principal features of the account. Unfortunately, his diary is less concerned

with describing the scene than is the account of that later divine, the Reverend Dr. du Bose. He was reacting to much the same scene, perhaps in a spirit of more genuine admiration, but his comments on the wealth and splendor of the place are comparable. "All the government palaces and residences are similar in grandness and extent to those in Hangchow. The commerce in the markets is beyond imagining. There are 360 large stone bridges, for on east and west, on south and north, there are canals all about." Seijin called on eminent monks, visited the Pao-en Temple (the site of the Great Pagoda), he remarked on its gardens with their rockeries and streams and other elaborate contrivances which he found, again, "beyond imagining." One item is lacking from his observations of Soochow in 1072. He failed to mention the Great Pagoda, Soochow's "statue of antiquity" and certainly its most imposing tower throughout most of the recent millennium.

#### V. SOOCHOW AND THE CHINESE SENSE OF THE PAST

The Japanese visitor, Monk Seijin, may have failed to mention the Great Pagoda because it was then in serious disrepair. It may even have largely collapsed by 1072; we know only that it was wholly rebuilt about ten years later. The Great Pagoda is one of the "ancient landmarks" of Soochow, one of the city's many links with its past, yet to avoid misleading analogies to the physical monuments of the past in our own tradition, we must consider what kind of a link it was, and to what kind of a past. This has much to do with the role of cities, where the accumulation of such links should function in the most significant manner.

In the midst of his own description of Soochow's great streets and buildings, the Reverend Dr. du Bose notes:

There are no ancient ruins in the city. The local history tells us of many famous buildings which were the pride of the people in the centuries gone by, yet their walls were not built of hewn stone, as in Athens and Rome, so as to withstand the ravages of ages, but only of crumbling brick and of fancifully carved wood and which after a conflagration has swept away a block, or a destructive rebellion has drawn its plowshare through the streets, preserve nothing to tell the tale of their former glory, save the decapitated and mutilated stone lions. (p. 32)

His observation is largely correct. Is Soochow, then, a city of ancient monuments, or a city in which the awareness of antiquity comes from something else? In our tradition, we tend to equate the antique presence with authentically ancient physical objects. China has no ruins comparable to the Roman Forum, or even to Angkor Wat which is a thousand years younger. It has no ancient buildings kept continuously in use such as Rome's Pantheon and Istanbul's Hagia Sophia. It does not have those, *not* because of incapacity to build with "hewn stone, as in Athens and Rome," as du Bose suggests.<sup>18</sup> It does not have those because of differences in attitude—a different attitude

toward the way of making the monumental achievement, and a different attitude toward the ways of achieving the enduring monument.

Chinese civilization reveals very clearly, in its architecture, that the impulse to build in China, and its counterpart in the Western traditions, were vastly different. Likewise, the physical form and substance of cities, and the functional roles of the city's monuments in preserving and transmitting the values of antiquity, differed.

Soochow's Great Pagoda well illustrates the point. The local histories tell that the temple to which it is attached, the forerunner of the present Pao-en Temple, was founded early in the third century A.D. That is considered to be the beginning of its history as a monument in Soochow. But that temple was located on various sites in and near the city walls for some centuries until it was rebuilt in a grand manner in the tenth century. From that time the temple compound has existed on its present site at the north end of Soochow's central thoroughfare. In fact, an important pagoda had stood on that site since the sixth century. It was that old pagoda of eleven stories which had collapsed, and which was then impressively rebuilt in the years 1078-1085, shortly after Monk Seijin's visit in 1072. Subsequently, that pagoda and the temple buildings associated with it were destroyed in 1130, in warfare accompanying the Jurchen Conquest of the Northern Sung. Within two or three decades, in the middle of the twelfth century, temple and pagoda were again grandly reconstructed, the pagoda now with nine stories, but as tall or taller than the previous eleven-story one had been. That pagoda, pictured on the map of 1229, is the immediate ancestor of the present one. But it too underwent major reconstruction in 1449, burned in the year 1570, was completely rebuilt during the years 1582-1590, began to lean ominously within a decade, then was righted and repaired in 1603. It was thoroughly renovated in 1671, but during the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion, when Soochow was invested by the rebels in 1861, the temple was razed and its pagoda was reduced to a ruin of only seven stories. Once again Buddhist piety and local pride combined to find the resources for a grand rebuilding, completed in 1900. That raw, new structure is the tower which the Reverend Dr. du Bose climbed in the first decade of this century, and which he called Soochow's "statue of antiquity."

This history is typical of China's ancient monuments. No building with such a pedigree would count for much as an authentic antiquity even in the United States, much less in Rome. It certainly would not count for much among Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*. And if Viollet-le-Duc is considered to have desecrated monuments and abused history by his pedantic restorations in France, where he strove to remove accretions and return all buildings exactly to the state intended by their primary architects, what feelings must the history of Soochow's Great Pagoda arouse among history-minded students of architecture?<sup>19</sup>

The point most emphatically is not that China was *not* obsessed with its

past. It studied its past, and drew upon it, using it to design and to maintain its present as has no other civilization. But its ancient cities such as Soochow were "time free" as purely physical objects. They were repositories of the past in a very special way—they embodied or suggested associations whose value lay elsewhere. The past was a past of words, not of stones. China kept the largest and longest-enduring of all mankind's documentations of the past. It constantly scrutinized that past as recorded in words, and caused it to function in the life of its present. But it built no Acropolis, it preserved no Roman Forum, and not because it lacked the materials or the techniques. Its enduring structures of cut stone in antiquity were most characteristically burial vaults secreted underground, and, in the later imperial era, were bridges. Those vaults and bridges were called upon to serve a different level of utility; enduring public monuments to man's achievements did not call forth those means.

Chinese civilization did not lodge its history in buildings. Even its most grandiose palace and city complexes stressed grand layout, the employment of space, and not buildings, which were added as a relatively impermanent superstructure.<sup>20</sup> Chinese civilization seems not to have regarded its history as violated or abused when the historic monuments collapsed or burned, as long as those could be replaced or restored, and their functions regained. In short, we can say that the real past of Soochow is a past of the mind; its imperishable elements are moments of human experience. The only truly enduring embodiments of the eternal human moments are the literary ones.

One illustration of this is found in the way the local histories describe the physical parts of a city such as Soochow. Sections of those works called "historical outline" or "establishment and construction" relate the history of the uses of the site, while other sections titled "streets and lanes" or "bridges and crossings" or "residences and buildings" or "temples" or "historic remains" list all of the physical parts of the city, accompanying those items with what seem to be their descriptions. In fact, however, those are rarely if ever described. Dimensions usually are given for city walls, but seldom is even that much description given for buildings. Instead, to cite an example, a bridge is named, and the date of its construction or reconstruction may follow. But the "description" most frequently will be an appended poem, or a series of poems in chronological order of composition, or of belletristic essays, each expressing some more or less explicit association with the bridge. The local histories vary in quality, some being more businesslike and some more literary in purpose.<sup>21</sup>

Even so businesslike a gazetteer as that published in 1883 under the title *Su-chow-fu Chih* has such an entry under the heading for the famous "Maple Bridge" spanning the Grand Canal in the northwest suburb. The T'ang poet Chang Chi's poem has made the bridge known to every Chinese, and many Western students of Chinese have learned the poem from Lesson Twenty-two

of Y. R. Chao's *Mandarin Primer*. The person who turns to the gazetteer wanting to know what kind of a bridge it was will find the following:

*Maple Bridge*: Located seven *li* west of the Ch'ang gate. [A discussion follows proving that the name "maple" is incorrect; a homophone of "maple" was originally the correct name, but after Chang Chi wrote his poem calling it "maple bridge" everyone took to writing the name that way.] . . . The present bridge was built in 1770, and rebuilt by the Magistrate of Ch'ang-chou Hsien, K'uai Te-mo, in 1867. . . .

Then follows a small anthology of poems, starting with the Chang Chi poem establishing a lonely traveler's mood as his association with the bridge. The second poem, by the later T'ang poet Chang Yu, builds on that association; his poem is about the desolate loneliness of long separation, of which the traveler is reminded when his boat stops there on a rainy night. Next comes a poem by the Sung poet Fan Ch'eng-ta, of Soochow's famous Fan clan.<sup>22</sup> This is an occasional poem for the departure of a friend, and uses the theme of the traveler, but shifts the mood to one of less sadness. Then comes a poem by the fourteenth-century Soochow native, Kao Ch'i. It is in the manner of poems "inspired by an object," in this case, the famous bridge. Kao Ch'i notes that of all the three hundred bridges of his city, this one is the most famous, all because of Chang Chi's poem, and every time he passes it he thinks of his T'ang predecessor—virtually hearing the ravens call, seeing the moon set, and perceiving the distant temple bell's sound, as mentioned in Chang's poem. Last is a poem by Kao Ch'i's contemporary and friend, Chang Yü, whose associations with the bridge again are those of the solitary and sad traveler whose pursuits in the busy world may be, he suggests, of questionable value.<sup>23</sup>

In all that psycho-historical material associated with the Maple Bridge, the bridge as an object is of little importance; we are not told of what material it is built, how big it is, or what it looks like. Except for noting eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century reconstructions, we are told nothing about its physical existence since T'ang times when, because of a poet's associations with it, it became important in history. The poems all capture moments of experience or of reflection involving the bridge, but even more, involving the earlier poems inspired in some indirect way by the bridge. No single poem appended there refers to its physical presence. The bridge as idea was an item in the consciousness of all Chinese who ever knew the poem, which meant virtually every literate Chinese and many semi-literate and even illiterate Chinese, so widely known was the standard T'ang anthology. Yet its reality to them was not the stones forming its span so much as the imperishable associations with it; those eternal moments realized in words. The physical object is entirely secondary. Anyone planning to achieve immortality in the minds of his fellow men might well give a lower priority to building some great stone monument than to cultivating his human capacities so that



he might express himself imperishably in words, or at least be alluded to in some enduring line by a poet or essayist of immortal achievement.

After reading the local histories of Soochow, one may well come to think of that city as an ideational tumulus. The archeologist exploring it must be prepared to comb through accumulated layers of verbal artifacts, to reconstruct a past urban environment as it was psychologically present in the minds of Soochow's residents. The literary remains merely sampled in the gazetteers, and more fully present in the libraries of scholars, are to Soochow as is the Forum to Rome. From them every educated Chinese could reconstruct a real Soochow in his mind, without the cracks and the scars that mar old stones. He might even have preferred a substantial and usable rebuilt bridge or pagoda to an antique wreck. We must assume that even the ordinary man in the street also lived with an awareness of much of that ideally real city, as well as with the physical remnants of the city's long history.

#### VI. SOOCHOW IN SPACE, AND SPACE IN SOOCHOW

The walls and other features of Soochow as seen both in the map of 1229 and the aerial photograph of 1945 are the same walls, gates, inner and outer moats, in the same way that the Great Pagoda last rebuilt in 1900 is the same pagoda that was constructed in 1080, or 1150, or 1449, or 1590, or whenever. The walls are between thirteen and fourteen miles in length, enclosing a site occupied for well over two thousand years, but walls that assumed their present extent and precise location probably between A.D. 626 and 875. When rebuilt and strengthened in 922 they acquired brick and stone facing for the first time, and were enlarged to what is approximately their size throughout subsequent history, i.e., about twenty-five feet high and twenty-five feet thick at the base. The Mongol conquerors ordered the leveling of many city walls early in the reign of Khubilai Khan, in the 1280's, fearing that walled cities might serve as bastions of Chinese resistance to them. We do not really know how thoroughly Soochow's walls were dismantled at that time, but in the 1350's the Mongols urgently ordered the rebuilding of city walls that previously had been ordered removed, now to guard Mongol defenders against Chinese rebels. Soochow's walls were rebuilt at that time by, among others, a Chinese rebel who had occupied the city. Any slight changes that might have been made in the walls themselves between 1229 and 1945 seem scarcely to have affected the layout of streets, canals, bridges, and major temples and government buildings. Actual land use changes may have occurred, but within an enduring shell of physical forms, and a continuing pattern of open and occupied space. The area enclosed is over twelve square miles, with room comfortably to hold from a quarter-million to half a million inhabitants even though they live almost entirely in one-story houses each having some open ground-space attached.<sup>24</sup> The city walls

enclosing that space, like most other material components of the city, have existed in their present form and with their present functions, for a millennium or longer.

In the remarkable continuity of Soochow as a city, the impermanence of the city's individual parts and the stability of its form and physical presence, as well as the pervasiveness of its past in the minds of the living, are typical of Chinese cities, and of Chinese civilization.

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When we turn from the vertical extension of the city in time to its lateral extension in space, we again perceive some distinctive features of Chinese civilization. The city in China, compared with the pre-industrial city of Europe, was a very open institution. Its residents had no legal or social status distinguishing them from rural residents; they were not even constituents of different administrative units. A city's people probably had no sense of themselves as forming a cohesive and self-perpetuating urban group. They belonged to no civic organs, and many had their family and their clan bases, their primary organizational ties, in rural places. There was much daily movement in and out of cities, and although certain functions necessary to society had to be located where there were dense populations, there was no necessary pattern governing which functions should be located within the city wall and which outside. The lone exception is the executive level of civil administration itself. Local and regional governments were invariably located within city walls if such existed, and by the later imperial era they existed even at the county level in almost all cases. That is, in fact, what city walls signified. Cities ignored their walls as barriers except in rare crisis situations, and wore them as badges of office, as it were, in their daily existence. There was no clear-cut space utilization pattern isolating the urban and the rural sectors of Chinese society. At points of intersection, that is, in and about cities, the pattern of their spatial deployment was one of mutually penetrating extensions.

Moreover, upward social mobility was not contained within the urban sector, but used the cities as way-stations. That is, patterns of social interaction between rural and urban social elements were those of profound mutual involvement. There may have been a trend toward concentration of the elite in cities as places of domicile in the later imperial era, but it was at best a trend; throughout the traditional period in Chinese social history, the elite was widely diffused in space, and psychologically oriented toward as many rural ties as urban ones. Soochow was justly famous in China as a place that realized to quite a special degree the idealized Chinese life. The extension of the city in space, and the uses of space within the city as we observe those in Soochow may not be quite typical of China, but the patterns recognizable

there nonetheless will be instructively relevant to the nature of Chinese civilization.

The extension of the city in space is perhaps most clearly seen in the economic life of the society. Cities were organizational nodes in the networks of marketing and distribution, and in finance and banking systems. Yet, in the case of Soochow, the commercial and banking concentration was outside the city, in the suburbs to the west of the city walls, extending some distance along the Grand Canal. As for craft industry, silk weaving was concentrated within the northeast corner inside the walls, but cotton weaving was outside the city, rather dispersed. The manufacture of the famous Soochow dyed and printed cotton textiles was spread even farther. Skilled labor hiring points, mostly for laborers hired for very short terms or by the day, were both within the city and outside it. Specialized markets for products such as fish, fancy fruits and vegetables, and certain manufactures were located in market towns ten and fifteen miles away and farther; they often served Soochow as specifically and as importantly as Soochow in other ways contributed to their existence. Inside the city, the elite classes, whether of officialdom or of commerce and industry, displayed no distinctly urban modes of dress, of housing, or of life style; out in the small market towns, or in truly rural settings, those would be no different.<sup>25</sup> Without attempting to describe economic life in any detail, it is possible to conclude that the extension of the city's activities and social attitudes went far beyond the city, even though in an essentially agrarian society.

The organization of learning displays something of the nature of Chinese society. It was theoretically an open society, intensely achievement-oriented, and committed above all to achievement via learning. The route to status lay through learning, which could be greatly aided by wealth but could not be bought. Cities helped to generate and aggregate wealth, much of which was used to sustain learning, and not merely for the possessors of wealth. In the pursuits sustained by wealth and related to learning, there is an apparent trend at work. In Ming times and through the seventeenth century, those activities appear to a significant extent to have used resources located outside the cities, in rural places. The private academies where the most prestigious teachers assembled clung to a rural ideal and often were in rural settings. Later on, in Ch'ing times, from the eighteenth century onward, they tended to cluster in and about cities, with government encouragement. Yet all the processes in manufacturing and publishing books continued to be characteristically rural village activities, as were their supporting craft industries such as the manufacture of paper and ink. The writing of the period's important books appears to have relied very little on concentrations of intellectuals in urban settings.

Nonetheless, the great regional cities could establish and maintain within the urban nexus some unusual means for accomplishing social and official

success in Chinese society. No city in the entire later imperial era did that more spectacularly than Soochow. Specifically, Soochow served its immediate small region—the prefecture—as the place where the government's literary examinations were to be sat for. Thus the talent of the immediate region all passed through Soochow while pursuing that goal. There was a great amount of unused spillover from this process which tended to remain in a city such as Soochow, because the wealth of the place could offer it employment, if nothing else as tutors aiding others in the same process. A distinct tradition of education, developed out of local personalities and grown into a special local pride, helped to recruit resources for cultural purposes in Soochow. Soochow drew to it thinkers and writers, high officials in retirement, and all of the people who served their needs for the arts, for ostentatious consumption, for the medical and other sciences, for entertainment and stimulation. Even though the leading figures might themselves reside outside the city in rural settings, they used the city. The service corps in society serving their needs and wants often found it easiest to live within the urban area. As a region grew famous for such things, it drew from a widening sphere, and thus became even more famous. In the case of Soochow, this process had been building up since Sung times, and it was one of the few regions of China that had continued to develop in this way without interruption in the Mongol period, when so many aspects of life were interrupted elsewhere throughout the realm.

Thus there was a flow of learners and intellectuals and makers of the high culture in and out of Soochow; at the local level, that was true of all prefectures. But there also developed a parallel flow of the same elements in society at the regional level. Ultimately, by the sixteenth century or sooner, that flow in and out drew from the nation, and gave back to the nation. No one city ever dominated all of China financially, commercially, or culturally. But Soochow's wealth came close to dominating the financial and commercial activities of the richest region of China, and its intellectual and cultural life came as close as any one city's could to playing the dominant role for the entire nation.<sup>26</sup>

Given the growing scope of Soochow's role in national life, it could play to a fuller extent than most cities a role that was nonetheless in some degree common to all. This role of cities is related to the function of density which makes certain kinds of activities possible, and which permits the individual a relationship to urban society that a small rural context does not permit. The urban setting is a necessary condition for the emergence of some forms of individualism. Every inhabitant of a city can have a range of daily contacts with unknown persons that would not occur in a village, and it conditions his psyche to accept that, even to utilize it. Some relationships become depersonalized. Anonymity, an unexperienced state in a village, can exist in many contexts in a great city. Marion J. Levy, Jr., has developed these ideas most

fully for their application to social theory;<sup>27</sup> their implications have not yet been fully worked out for the traditional Chinese city. That is, we do not know enough about patterns of behavior and of daily life in cities; did those in practice restrict many persons' significant contacts to a small circle of known personalities? That may have been the case. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that in traditional cities such as Soochow in Ming and Ch'ing times, freer expression of individual eccentricities was possible, and deviant behavior escaped some of the surveillance and restriction that the village would have imposed. In Soochow, with its great wealth, pleasures became more varied, the idle could congregate, imaginations stirred each other. Much of the activity which resulted was non-productive, resulting only in dissipation or exhaustion of resources and energies. Soochow was infamous in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a dissolute city.

Not all dissolute behavior was non-productive, however. Many of those who lived on the fringes of Soochow's more flamboyant dissipation were the immortals in scholarship, in thought, in literature and the arts, in sciences and the crafts. That is not to make the argument that moral degeneracy, by any society's standards, is a prerequisite of creativity. But one can argue that in a highly normative and highly regularized society such as that of traditional China, those urban conditions of ease, of variety, of anonymity, and of greater personal freedom provided by the city, are the same conditions that encouraged some kinds of deviant expression, of experimentation, of dissidence, occasionally even of genuine creativity. In space, these factors were not confined entirely to the city limits, if we mean the area bounded by Soochow's walls. Nor were they confined to the immediately adjacent suburbs, which were as urban as the area within the walls. When Soochow is named, it is the entire prefecture which is designated; the Chinese usage demanded no regular distinction between those. Many of the activities mentioned here moved in and out of the city, even beyond its dense suburbs, to its rural recreation places, to the market towns that formed part of its commercial structure, even to the nearer mountains and lakes that provided its rural retreats. Yet without Soochow at the center, some of the cultural activities here mentioned would have been impossible, and the cluster of them would have lacked its integrating focus.

So much for the city and the ways by which peculiarly urban features concentrated there also extended themselves and their impact beyond the city. The counterpart to all that is the ways in which rural elements were welcomed into the city, were idealized there, exerted normative influences there, and contributed to the deployment and design of space within the city.

In an agrarian society, particularly one that claimed to honor agricultural pursuits above all except learning and public office, it is not surprising perhaps that the cities were open to rural influences. In China, one did not scorn



peasants so as to maintain self-esteem, one scorned merchants, regardless of what connections with commerce-derived income one might have. Clan organizations in traditional China customarily cut across social strata; members of elite families usually had humble relatives who lived on the soil. Those might be amusingly rustic but they could not for that be made despicable. Country people are strong, admirable types in most Ming and Ch'ing period fiction, as well as in the normative writings.

The entire society lived according to an agrarian calendar which fixed the festivals and holidays observed by all. There were, to my knowledge, no strictly urban festivals in traditional China. On the festival days, whose names often suggest rural associations, urban residents went to the countryside to sweep graves, or ascend heights, or hold boat races. Otherwise, on the major holidays, rural residents came into the cities with the special products of the land, without which the feasting and the celebrations would be incomplete; they mingled in the market places to exchange the cash taken in from selling their special holiday produce to buy trinkets made in the city. The twenty-four two-week divisions of the solar year all bore names reminding the people of the weather and of its implications for agricultural work. The cadence of life in the entire society was set by rural society's needs and interests.

In the use of space within urban areas, rural concepts dominated. Chinese agriculture is labor intensive; a small plot can utilize the labor of many persons, and can be made to produce a large output. Chinese cuisine demands fresh agricultural products which, apart from cereal grains and some other strictly rural products, can be produced on small plots. The demand for these encourages their production in great variety and quantity, while taste demands that they be sold live in the case of poultry and fish, and fresh-picked in the case of greens and fruits.<sup>28</sup> Intensive truck gardening is found within and on the edges of all Chinese cities, often benefiting from the urban production of human waste fertilizer. Thus land within the urban complex frequently can be used profitably for agriculture. Some areas within the walls of Soochow seem always to have been devoted to commercial truck gardening, and most commoner houses devoted a small portion of their tiny yards to gardening. Some of the nearer suburbs remained open fields used for urban market crops, while some urban build-ups extended farther beyond the city walls than would have been necessary, had it been more desirable to use all the land adjacent to the walls for urban development.

Beyond these utilitarian considerations governing the employment of urban empty space, there were not many opportunities to design urban empty space for other uses. Public spaces were seldom large, for the community and the government had little or no need for that. China's cities have no town halls, hence no town squares; there were no civic activities, no circuses and no parades, hence no need for great public spaces. Moreover, not even the

urban poor lived crowded into tenements of many stories; they also had access to tiny bits of private open space, so no promenades or parks were a social necessity. Temples had great courtyards that the public used for fairs and for strolling; the dykes along canals also served similar purposes. City crowds tended to patronize rural temples in the nearer suburbs as European city residents formerly went for recreation into common grounds or public woods. The grandiose or formal design of open urban space was unknown in the Chinese city; not even the great temple precincts provided that. Since 1949 a vast area has been cleared in front of the main palace entrance in Peking for the use of mass civic demonstrations. That may be considered an example among many of the Stalinization of China's public life; it has no form or function precedents in Imperial or in Republican China.

However, an ideal of rural space, especially that of a romantically conceived wild and distant space, had a powerful attraction for the Chinese imagination. The ostentatious use of great wealth in traditional China could never have produced the great town houses and formal gardens of Europe. Instead, it produced ingenious reproductions of seemingly simple rural space, with mountains, streams, fantastic rocks, and ancient trees. The urban garden seldom was large; it attempted to give the illusion of space by interrupting the vistas, winding paths around obstructions, and creating miniature representations of vastness. Even when it could employ large space, it did not make a display of size. Soochow was a city of famous gardens. Government buildings and temples had such gardens; so had the residences of the well-to-do. The ruling concept in designing gardens was purity, never grandeur. "Rural" space, devoted to the most practical and utilitarian kind of intensive commercial gardening, and rural space of the most idealized kind, devoted to pleasure gardens—both formed parts of the Chinese city. Those uses gave evidence to both the realistic and the idealized subservience to rural life in the utilization of urban space.<sup>29</sup>

There were no zones of uniform land use in Chinese cities, and no evident concentric rings or other zone patterns of land values. Only small cities, incapable of supporting a proliferation of commercial activities, had one "main street," or "city center." Nor did traditional Chinese cities have their fashionable quarters, or slum quarters, as those have existed in the West. All residential streets looked the same, more or less, masking the life of individual homes behind uniform walls. The result is that Chinese cities were full of great surprises and intriguing deceptions, even mysteries. One might not know before stepping through a gate and around a screen wall to look into the courtyard beyond, whether he would find a mansion or a soy sauce factory, or a mansion being used as a factory. After walking through a front courtyard and into the first structure of a residence, he would not know whether he would then come upon a small work yard filled with wood and charcoal, or find an exquisite garden with water and flowering trees. Pressures on land



IDEALIZED RURAL SPACE. From "Collection of Views of the Soochow Region."  
Ink on paper by Shen Chou (1427-1509), Palace Museum, Taiwan.



IDEAL SPACE REALIZED WITHIN SOOCHOW. View in the Lion's Grove, former private garden in Soochow.  
From Oswald Sirén, *Gardens of China*, Ronald Press, 1949.

use and concepts of ideal space achieved special patternings in Chinese cities, for which neither one's experience with Western cities, nor even a knowledge of the West's Urban Sociology might give the visitor adequate preparation.

## NOTES

1. Some contemporary societies, perhaps China among them, may attempt through conscious policy implementation to design another path into the modernized world. Apart from such possibilities, there are real questions of other kinds about the capacities of many societies to achieve modernization that would sustain high levels of urbanization. See Marion J. Levy, Jr., *Modernization: Latecomers and Survivors* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), especially pp. 3-28, "The Gist of the Matter for Latecomers," for a succinct overview.

2. Most of the information on the general features of Chinese urbanism here is drawn from Gilbert Rozman, *Urban Networks in Ch'ing China and Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

3. This writer, briefly comparing Chinese cities with cities in Western history, has pointed out a few illustrations of the ways in which the scholarly writings on cities in world history have projected generalizations made quite in ignorance of Chinese urban history; see F. W. Mote, "The Transformation of Nanking, 1350-1400," in G. W. Skinner, ed., *The City in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming). An abridgment of that appears in James T. C. Liu and Peter Golas, *Traditional China* (Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 42-50. Of course, students of China, among others, are constantly lodging their tiresome protests, such as this one, against the parochialism of Western intellectual pursuits.

4. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), pp. 80-81; also, Marx and Engels, *Critique of the Gotha Program* (New York: International Publishers, 1938), pp. 3-4. I am indebted for these references to Khien Theeravitaya, *The Hsia-fang System: Bureaucracy and Nation Building in Communist China, 1957-1969* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 1971), pp. 98-99, where under the heading "C. Contradiction: the City and the Countryside," the author shows how this axiom from European contexts has become a tenet of Chinese Marxism also. In his recent book, *On the Democratic Idea in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), Irving Kristol offers a valuable analysis of what it means to live in an urban civilization; see Chapter One, "Urban Civilization and Its Discontents." Yet Kristol also somewhat overgeneralizes about the axiomatic nature and the universality of urban-rural hostility in history.

5. Photograph of a rubbing in the possession of the Academia Sinica, obtained for the Gest Research Library at Princeton University by the Special Assistant University Librarian and Curator of East Asian collections, James S. K. T'ung. This is the famous "P'ing-chiang-t'u pei," much studied by recent Japanese and Chinese historians for the light it sheds on Sung urban history. See, especially, a pioneering study verifying and using it, by Katō Shigeshi, called "Sōdai toshi no hattatsu" ("The Development of cities in the Sung Period"), originally published in 1931; also included in the two volumes of Katō's collected works, *Shina Keizaiishi Kōshō*, (Tokyo: Tōyōbunko, 1952-1953). This article is also included in Wu Chieh's translation of the latter, *Chung-kuo Ching-chi-shih K'ao-cheng* (Peking: Commercial Press, 1959).

6. Courtesy of the World War II archives of the United States Fourteenth Air Force.

7. P'ing-ti Ho, "An Estimate of the Total Population of Sung-Chin China," in *Etudes Song/Demographie* (Paris: Publications of the Sung History Project, 1967), p. 51.



8. Hampden C. du Bose, *"Beautiful Soo," A Handbook to Soochow* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1911), pp. 63 and 69.

9. Kyoto among non-Chinese cities may come closest to matching this record, although as a national capital it has been more subject to the vicissitudes of political change, and has experienced both more physical change and greater declines of population than have Soochow and a number of China's larger cities.

10. Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1972), p. 28.

11. See two studies by Etienne Balazs in his *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964): "Chinese Towns," pp. 66-78; and "Marco Polo in the Capital of China," pp. 79-100.

12. See Gilbert Rozman, work cited in note 2, above.

13. See P'ing-ti Ho, "Early-Ripening Rice in Chinese History," in *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, IX, no. 2 (December, 1956); and further discussions of agricultural innovation in relation to population growth in the same author's *Studies on the Population of China, 1368-1953* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959). Note also comments on the agricultural wealth of the region, quoted in Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society in Sung China*, translated by Mark Elvin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970), pp. 50-59.

14. P'ing-ti Ho, "The Salt Merchants of Yang-chou," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17, nos. 1-2 (June, 1954).

15. Du Bose, *Handbook*, see note 8, above. I am indebted for this to Prof. Robert Kapp of the History Department, Rice University; he found a copy in a used book store and presented it to me. Despite its quirky and occasionally somewhat supercilious manner, characteristic of its time and its author's milieu, the student of Soochow history will find this small work well worth reading.

16. The "Porcelain Pagoda," the pagoda of the Ta Pao-en Ssu of Nanking, built early in the fifteenth century and destroyed during the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion in the mid-nineteenth century, was taller; statements about its height vary, reporting heights ranging from 276 to 300 feet.

17. Passages quoted here are translated from Seijin's travel diary, *San tendai gōdaisan ki*. I have used the edition in the collection of Japanese historical materials called *Shiseki Shūran* (Tokyo, 1898), vol. 26, pp. 647-814; the passages quoted in translation appear in *chūan* 3, on pp. 692-694. I am indebted for this reference to Katō Shigeshi's essay on Soochow, "Soshū Konjaku" in his collection of essays written while traveling in China, *Shingaku Zasso* (Tokyo, 1944), and to Mr. Jae-hyon Byon for calling the book to my attention. Biographies of Seijin, and of Entsū (mentioned below), also known by his name Jakushō, can be found in the Japanese *Lives of Eminent Monks*, the *Honchō kōsō den* (1702), ch. 67, pp. 11a-14b.

18. The prevailing styles and modes of Chinese architecture appear to represent choices made in consciousness of alternatives. There is ample evidence that Chinese building skills included elements not unlike those of the Greeks and the Romans in areas of engineering, in understanding the principles of the arch and the barrel vault, and in techniques of masonry construction. The stone bridges of China, hundreds of which date from Sung and earlier times, employing complex engineering principles and perfectly constructed stone arches of considerable span, are particularly numerous and noteworthy in the Soochow region. One Soochow temple dating from Sung times is known as the "beamless temple" because it employs masonry to enclose large spaces under barrel vaults instead of the more common post-and-lintel construction of the usual Chinese style; it looks much

like a Romanesque basilica, minus transepts and apse, but fully demonstrating the capacity to create monumental buildings of enduring materials. For a convenient survey of Chinese architecture, with many drawings, diagrams, and photos, see *Chung-kuo chien-chu lei-hsing chi chieh-kou* (*Forms and Structural Methods of Chinese Architecture*) by Liu Chih-p'ing (Peking, 1957). See also Andrew Boyde, *Chinese Architecture and Town Planning* (London, 1962).

19. "Viollet-le-Duc dominates French architecture from 1840 to 1870, both by his work as a restorer and by his books. Vézelay, Saint-Denis, Notre-Dame-de-Paris, Amiens, Chartres, Reims, St. Sernin at Toulouse, and later Carcassonne and Pierrefonds, almost all the great monuments of the Middle Ages, passed through his hands and in many cases were his victims. Nowadays we judge his restorations very severely, but not unjustly. In spite of his pretensions, *no mind was less historical, if by this we mean respectful of the past. . .*" (Emphasis added.) Pierre Lavedan, *French Architecture* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1956), p. 146.

20. In somewhat different terms, and with different intent, Arthur F. Wright has called attention to the great significance attached to city ground-plan and the nonetheless insubstantial nature of the buildings. In his Presidential Address to the Association for Asian Studies he has discussed the early Chinese imperial capital as "*urbs ephemera*"; see his "Symbolism and Function: Reflections on Changan and Other Great Cities," *Journal of Asian Studies* XXIV, no. 4 (August, 1965), 667-679, especially pp. 676-679. See also Wright's "The Cosmology of the Chinese City," in G. Wm. Skinner, ed., *The City in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming). One might speculate that Chinese property concepts were a conditioning element, depressing the value attached to buildings. That Chinese society was one with "weak property concepts" has often been noted; that may explain the lack of heavy investment in ostentatious family buildings; traditional China's elite seem never to have equated elite status with the use of magnificent buildings, no matter how splendid their life styles otherwise were. The *palazzi* of Renaissance Italian cities did more than protect their noble inhabitants; they faced each other in an enduring confrontation of status and property, one in which princes had to out-rival counts and dukes, and kings were pressed to still grander demonstrations. Chinese society displays different mechanisms.

21. The Soochow gazetteer worked on through the mid-Ming by a number of eminent literary figures and brought to completion for printing in 1506, known as the *Ku-su Chih*, is the most "literary" of all local histories of Soochow; it was often praised as one of the best gazetteers compiled in the Ming period. See Chang Kuo-kan, "Chung-kuo ti-fang-chih k'ao" ("Studies on China's local gazetteers"), "Part Four, Kiangsu Province" in *Yü-kung*, 4, no. 9 (1935), for a discussion of this and other local histories of Soochow.

22. See Denis Twitchett, "The Fan Clan's Charitable Estate," in D. S. Nivison and A. F. Wright, eds., *Confucianism in Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 97-102.

23. Kao Ch'i and Chang Yü are discussed in F. W. Mote, *The Poet Kao Ch'i 1336-1374* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), ch. 33, pp. 11b-12a.

24. To work out the implications of these figures, a population of 500,000 in 12½ square miles produces a density of about 40,000 to one square mile. That allows an average of 700 square feet per resident. If it is calculated that as much as 29% of that space may have been taken up by streets, public buildings, and the larger homes of the rich (or, roughly 200 of each 700 square feet), that still leaves 500 square feet of ground space for each individual, or 2500 square feet for the average household of five persons. That would allow a one-story house of 1500 square feet and an open courtyard or work space of 1000 square feet. As an average for the total population (the very rich excluded), that

seems well within the bounds of reason. Originally Soochow was laid out or bounded in the form which we see today when its population was probably closer to 250,000; the population within the walls may never have exceeded four to five hundred thousand, since the built-up areas outside the walls could have accommodated 200,000 or more inhabitants throughout most of the last millennium. Ku Yen-wu, the seventeenth-century savant, referred to Soochow as typical of the spacious cities laid out in the Sung period, and regretted the loss of scale and scope in the cities built thereafter.

25. There is much evidence for this, showing that the urban-rural continuity of cultural forms was not merely a vague scholar-official kind of elite ideal. For example, the book *Su-chou chuan-k'e* (*Soochow's sculpted brick-tiles*), compiled by Kuo Han (Shanghai: Shanghai Jen-min mei-shu publishers, 1963), investigates a characteristic art form used to decorate walls and entrances of public buildings, temples, and upper-stratum residences. Examples shown and discussed range from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth, are located throughout the city, its environs, and into the towns and countryside. Some slight sense of period style emerges, but there is absolutely no urban-rural distinction to be seen here.

26. See the extremely suggestive article by Miyazaki Ichisada, "Mindai Soshō chihō no shidaibu to minshu" ("Local gentry and the common people in Ming period Soochow and Sung-chiang"), *Shirin*, 37, no. 3 (June, 1954), pp. 219-251. Miyazaki compares late Ming Soochow with Paris in France, and with Kyoto plus Osaka in Tokugawa Japan. He is particularly interested in a spirit of protest against Confucian formalism which Soochow fostered.

27. See Marion J. Levy, Jr., *Modernization and the Structure of Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), especially Part II, Ch. One, "Aspects of Any Relationship," pp. 133-174.

28. To illustrate, I once stayed in the home of a Chinese friend in Soochow. The host got up each morning that I was there and walked to a pond outside the city walls where he could buy fresh lotus root of superior quality to serve with breakfast. This was both recreation and connoisseurship for him; he insisted that lotus-root bought in the market the day before would have deteriorated by the time it was served. The cultivation of such rural-oriented tastes by a large segment of the urban population could determine land uses.

29. See *Gardens in Chinese Art*, catalog of an exhibition at the China House Gallery, New York (held March 21 to May 26, 1968), prepared by Wango H. C. Weng (published by the China Institute in America, 125 East 65th Street, New York, 1968). Also, Kao Chen, *Hua-yuan ch'eng Su-chou* (*Soochow, the Garden City*) (Shanghai, 1957).